

The Best of Morocco

Morocco has historically conjured images of ancient walled cities, desert-crossing camel caravans, Arab sultans, Berber tribesmen, and mud-walled kasbahs shaded by tall date palms. The good news is that the Morocco of today can still deliver this, plus much more. Independent since only 1956, this is a youthful country in more ways than one. The largely under-40 population is being led into a complicated 21st century by a young king, Mohammed VI, intent on retaining Morocco's diversity and traditional customs while encouraging tourism as a major form of economic development. Morocco is filled with unforgettable travel experiences, and somewhere along the journey it will surely test your sense of patience and good nature. This chapter is a personal review of the best Morocco has to offer, though I encourage you to discover your own magical Moroccan memories.

1 THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES IN MOROCCO

- **Meandering Along the Winding Streets of a Medina:** Within Morocco's old walled cities, known as medinas, you can immerse yourself in both the country's past and present. Formerly safe havens from invaders and marauders, today's medinas are intoxicating combinations of traditional and modern, where ancient mosques, crowded souks, and workshops of skilled craftsmen sit side by side with trendy *maisons d'hôte*, candlelit restaurants, and alfresco cafes. Making the time to wander around a medina's maze of streets, alleys, and lanes—including a few inevitable wrong turns and dead ends—will reward you with a greater insight to these beating hearts of Morocco.
- **Hearing the Muezzin Call to Prayer:** Five times a day, the call of "*Allah al Akbar*" (God is Great) resonates throughout Morocco, calling the faithful to the mosque to pray. The call comes from the top of the mosque's tower, called a minaret, and is traditionally the job of the *muezzin*, a sort of town crier. Although nowadays it's mostly a taped version played through loud speakers, the call to prayer is still an inspiring, spiritual sound.
- **Sunrise from the Top of a Saharan Dune:** Whether you've camped in the dunes overnight or slept in a nearby *auberge*, make sure you witness the beginning of a new Moroccan day from the crest of a dune on the edge of the Sahara. Experiencing the desert's utter tranquility while feeling the cold, soft grains of sand between your toes can be one of the most serene, invigorating, and reflective moments you'll ever have. See chapter 8.
- **Celebrating Eid al Fitr (Feast of Fast Breaking):** Upon the rise of the new moon after the fasting month of Ramadan, Morocco's Muslims—99% of the population—mark the end of the fast with 3 days of celebrations and festivities. Traveling in Morocco during this time showcases the country at its

most joyous and friendly, with many travelers being invited into local homes to share in the family feast.

- **Shopping & Haggling in the Souks:** Morocco's craftsmen are some of the most skilled in the world, with generations of families working in ceramics, jewelry, leather, metal, and wood. Many are located within the local markets, called souks, and this is where the shopping bargains are to be found. Bartering is part of the routine for locals, and is an accepted and expected practice within the souks.
- **Cafe Culture:** Do as the Moroccans do, and take some time out during your day to sit down at a pavement cafe, order a *café* or *thé*, and watch the world go by. In a country where bars and pubs are still largely kept out of sight, the cafe—

a byproduct of 44 years of French occupation—has become a major social element in Moroccan society. Moroccans come to chat, play endless games of checkers, conduct business meetings, watch football on TV, or simply catch up on the latest local gossip.

- **Seeing Snow-Topped Mountains in Africa:** You don't normally associate Africa with snow-topped mountain peaks, but travel in Morocco anytime between December and March, and you stand a good chance of sighting the powdery stuff on the taller mountains in both the Middle and High Atlas ranges. For the ultimate bragging right of having skied in Africa, head for the village of Oukaïmeden, home to the continent's highest ski lift and 20km (13 miles) of trails. See chapter 7.

2 THE BEST OF PHOTOGENIC MOROCCO

- **Jemaa el Fna (Marrakech):** Marrakech's famed square is the setting for an incredible spectacle that begins in the morning with snake charmers, West African Gnaoua musicians, and *nakka-chat*, veiled women ready to tattoo any bare piece of flesh with their henna-based designs. Come late afternoon, they are joined by all manner of performers—acrobats, dancers, musicians, and storytellers called *halkas*—and the square's heart converts to the country's largest open-air restaurant. More than 100 food carts offer traditional dishes such as couscous and tagine, along with specialties such as boiled escargot and roasted sheep's head. Surrounding the "show" is a circle of stalls selling freshly squeezed orange juice and dried fruit and nuts. It all adds up to a visual extravaganza, and each "performer" is ready and willing—upon payment of a few dirham—to be photographed. See the box, "Jemaa el Fna," on p. 116.
- **Chouwara Tannery (Fes):** The largest and busiest of Fes el Bali's traditional tanneries, Chouwara is a scene straight out of medieval times. The skins of camels, cows, goats, and sheep are stretched, cured in a concoction that includes cow urine and pigeon droppings, and laid out to dry. Workers in shorts then stomp around in various earthen pits, where the skins are dyed in natural colors taken from indigo (blue), mint (green), poppy (red), and turmeric (yellow). It makes for a stunning picture from the viewpoints above—strategically placed within the various leather shops—though the rancid smell emanating from the cocktail of chemicals certainly makes you earn it. See p. 246.
- **Camel Caravans in the Sand:** Whether in the soft glow of the morning light or silhouetted against the often rapidly setting sun, the image of trekking camels is the stuff of postcards and can be captured in Morocco's sand seas, Erg

Chebbi and Erg Chigaga. Here you'll find men (dressed in the flowing blue caftans and robes of the famed Tuareg nomads) walking alongside trains of loping one-humped dromedaries into the seemingly never-ending dunes of Saharan sands. See chapter 8.

- **Jardin Majorelle (Marrakech):** Within this popular city sight is the former studio of the original owner, artist Jacques Majorelle, and its brilliant cobalt-blue exterior contrasts strikingly with the surrounding flora of this now botanical garden. Jardin Majorelle's most recent owner was the very colorful and fashionable Frenchman, Yves Saint Laurent, who ensured the small building regularly received a fresh lick of color, sometimes simply described as "Majorelle blue" because of its combination of brightness and depth. The garden maintains its standing as a popular visual for Moroccan postcards and coffee table-style books. See p. 153.
- **The Colored Doors of the Medina:** Most architectural beauty within Morocco's medinas is to be found behind the doors of its houses, *maisons d'hôte*, *medersas*, and mosques. Often overlooked, however, are the doors themselves. The only obvious external feature distinguishing one establishment from the other, the doors of the medina are often a very visual reflection of the status of the family that lives behind it. They can range from simple and practical—often painted in bright blues, greens, reds, or whites—to castle-like creations complete with a brass knocker and mosaic archway. Those in the medinas of Asilah, Chefchaouen, Essaouira, and Fes, along with Rabat's kasbah, are particularly photogenic.
- **A Rainbow of Babouches:** Morocco's traditional slipper is the leather *babouche*, which is worn by men and women of all ages and backgrounds. Styles range from pointed to rounded toe in colors covering the whole spectrum of the rainbow. Walk through any market or souk in the country, and you're bound to find the local *babouche* quarter, where literally hundreds of *babouches* are displayed from floor to ceiling. Politely ask the shopkeeper if you can photograph his collection, and you may end up with a pair for yourself. Marrakech's Souk Smata (chapter 6) and Meknes's Souk es Sebbat (chapter 9) are just two market areas devoted to this popular footwear.
- **Spice Cones:** Spices are an everyday ingredient in the cuisine of Morocco and can be purchased from establishments ranging from small medina stalls to large nationwide supermarket chains. At the front of most spice stalls you'll see the various spices displayed in tall, cone-shape mounds within brass or steel vats. The vibrant color of these mounds of henna (green), chili (orange), paprika (red), and turmeric (yellow) are easy subjects for an image that sums up the exotic sights and smells of the country's medinas.
- **Souk des Teinturiers (Marrakech):** Marrakech's dyers' souk is one of the most photogenic—and photographed—areas of the city's medina, and with good reason. While *jellabah*-wearing shopkeepers sit outside their shops, the top of your camera's frame is filled with overhanging fabric and wool, still wet from being recently dyed in bright blues, oranges, reds, and yellows. The colorful subject matter is better some days than others, but give yourself a few consecutive days, and you'll more than likely be able to find your perfect picture. See p. 151.
- **Seffarine Square (Fes):** This busy square, bordering one side of the spiritual Kairouine Mosque, is home to the ancient city's brass and copper workshops. Although the noise generated by the constant banging and clanging can't

be captured on film, there's still plenty of scope for great images. Coppersmiths sit cross-legged while shaping everything from small decorative plates to huge cauldrons, and are generally receptive to camera-wielding visitors requesting a photo or two. See chapter 9.

- **Jellababs & Donkeys:** A *jellabab* (a traditional robe with a pointed hood) is still worn throughout the country by

both sexes and all ages, and many Moroccans still transport their goods, and themselves, by donkey. An everyday visual, this combination makes for a fascinating picture, especially in the larger towns and cities where the contrast of traditional and modern can be captured as the four-legged subjects plod by a KFC or McDonald's.

3 THE BEST KASBAHS & MEDINAS

- **Aït Ben Haddou:** One of the country's most picturesque kasbahs is also one of its most easily accessed. Just a 15-minute drive from the country's movie capital, Ouarzazate, Aït Ben Haddou has also seen its fair share of Hollywood stars, having been used in movies such as *Gladiator* and *Lawrence of Arabia*. A UNESCO World Heritage Site that sees more than 130,000 visitors a year, the kasbah is best visited early in the morning before both the crowds and heat arrive. This is when the first rays of sun light up the kasbah's earthen walls, and imaginative minds can conjure images of a time when this was one of the most important stops on the lucrative West African caravan trade route. See p. 203.
- **Fes el Bali:** Within this ancient medina's walls lies a medieval city as alive today as it was 1,200 years ago. Its 9,500 alleyways, lanes, and streets are largely pedestrian-only, and one turn can reveal a heaving mass of people, donkeys, mules, and produce, while another brings a calm, quiet, and cool picture of serenity. Considered Morocco's spiritual heart, it's also one of its most creative, with workshops housing skilled craftsmen found throughout. This is more than a must-see—it's a must experience. See chapter 9.
- **Essaouira:** This seaside resort's medina is Morocco's most traveler-friendly. Large enough to wander around for a couple of

days but small enough to never get too lost, it's a delightful mix of modern and traditional. There's a range of stylish yet affordable accommodations to suit all budgets and tastes, as well as a good choice of restaurants and cafes, all combining with traditional sights such as the fish market and jeweler's souk. There's also a large square that's perfect for a coffee break and quality people-watching, which leads onto a quaint port where fishermen still bring in the daily catch and mend their nets. See chapter 11.

- **Kasbah des Oudaiās:** Rabat's elevated and compact kasbah looks out over the mouth of the Oued Bou Regreg, and over the centuries it's seen dynasties come and go and has housed a band of notorious pirates. It's a quiet and airy quarter with a few attractions, a quaint *maison d'hôte*, and both a cafe and viewing *plateforme* that afford sweeping views of the river mouth and adjoining beaches. A welcoming sea breeze usually sifts its way through the kasbah, making for a very pleasant stroll through its winding alleys, past whitewashed houses and brightly colored doors. See p. 329.
- **Marrakech:** Fes's jet-setting sister is riding a massive tidal wave of popularity at the moment, largely thanks to a sharp rise in international airline routes flying directly from Europe. And who wouldn't want to come here? This city's ancient medina

has got it all: shops and souks specializing in most of the country's renowned crafts; a central square, Jemaa el Fna, where the most fascinating spectacle takes place daily; and a plethora of accommodations and restaurants ranging from traditional and conservative to ultrachic and sexy. See chapter 6.

- **Taroudannt:** Enclosed by an almost unbroken circuit of 16th-century walls and largely ambivalent to the pro-

claimed marvels of tourism, Taroudannt is as authentic as they come. Lacking any great sights, the attraction of coming here is the staunchly Berber town itself. Travelers can walk the streets without any hassle from touts or faux guides, watching the locals go about their everyday lives without the haste of many other Moroccan towns and cities. See chapter 12.

4 THE BEST CULTURAL & HISTORICAL SIGHTS

- **Tangier American Legation Museum:** In 1786, Morocco became the first country to formally recognize the infant United States of America. The Legation building was presented as a gift by Sultan Moulay Slimane to the American people in 1821 and housed the U.S. ambassador for the next 135 years. Conveniently located within Tangier's medina, the building, now a museum, houses various exhibitions showcasing the connection between the two countries and the many U.S. citizens who have resided in the city over the years. The Paul Bowles room is dedicated to the late writer, while another room displays a copy of a 1789 letter from George Washington to his "Great and Magnanimous Friend, the Emperor of Morocco," Sultan Moulay Ben Abdallah. See p. 297.
- **Mausoleum of Mohammed V (Rabat):** The burial shrine of the current king's grandfather and father is a place of reverence for Moroccans and visitors alike. In a dignified building watched over by elaborately dressed Royal Guards, the white onyx tombs of Mohammed V and his sons Hassan II and Moulay Abdallah can be viewed from an upper balcony. See p. 330.
- **Ben Youssef Medersa (Marrakech):** Marrakech's 16th-century former

Koranic school is one of the country's best examples of Islamic architecture. Try to ignore the steady stream of large tour groups, and marvel at the carved cedar facades and exquisite stucco and *zellij* (tilework). Quiet corners can often be found in one of the upper dormitories' cell-like rooms, where up to 800 students were housed. Apart from learning the Koran, students would also immerse themselves in Islamic law and the sciences. See p. 150.

- **Hassan II Mosque (Casablanca):** Built to commemorate the former king's 60th birthday, Casablanca's premier house of prayer is one of the largest in the world, able to house 25,000 worshipers under its retractable roof and another 80,000 in the courtyards and squares outside. Non-Muslims can view the mosque's interior on a guided tour, where the country's master craftsmen pulled out all stops to produce an amazing display of plaster, marble, glass, wood, and *zellij*. See p. 349.
- **Mausoleum of Moulay Ismail (Meknes):** The burial place of Morocco's longest-serving ruler, this is another of the few spiritual monuments open to non-Muslims. A relatively bland exterior and a series of plain yet serene courtyards lead the visitor to a quiet,

cool anteroom, resplendent in exquisite *zellij*, carved plaster, and marble columns ransacked from nearby Volubilis. From here, visitors can view the tomb from behind a small barrier and reflect on the life of a man both respected and feared by subjects and opponents alike. See p. 268.

- **Volubilis:** From A.D. 45 to 285, Volubilis was the capital of the Roman province Mauritania Tingitana and the southernmost outpost of the vast empire. Home to at least 20,000 inhabitants during its peak, the city's wealth

was built upon exporting vast quantities of olives and wheat back to Rome, as well supplying that city's coliseums with the majority of their gladiator-fighting lions. Virtually deserted by the 11th century and totally flattened by a devastating earthquake in 1755, the ruins of the city were partially excavated and reconstructed during the protectorate era. The site's triumphal arch, forum, and faded but still beautiful mosaics are best discovered during cool early mornings or at sunset. See chapter 9.

5 THE BEST OF NATURAL MOROCCO

- **Cascades d'Ouzoud:** The most scenic waterfalls in the country, the Central High Atlas's Cascades d'Ouzoud plunge 100m (328 ft.) into the river below, and the crashing water, surrounding lush woodland, and rural atmosphere have made this a popular tourist stop on the route between Marrakech and Fes. Here you'll also likely encounter the indigenous Barbary macaque monkey. See p. 187.
- **Todra Palmeraie & Gorge:** Following the Oued Todra to its aboveground source provides the traveler with stunning views of the lush, green Todra Palmeraie. Walking within the palmeraie is a wonderful attack on the senses, as fruit and palm trees overlook crops of grains and vegetables. The palmeraie ceases at the entrance to the majestic Todra Gorge, 300m (984 ft.) in length, 50m (164 ft.) across, and with towering 300m-high (984-ft.) walls. Here you'll find the aboveground beginnings of the Oued Todra, and dipping your toes in its icy waters is the best way to relax and take in one of Morocco's most dramatic natural sights. See chapter 8.
- **Erg Chebbi & Erg Chigaga:** Morocco's two most accessible sand seas are fed by

the ever-advancing Sahara Desert, and their color can change from golden to rust red, depending on the time of day. They are reached by crossing a flat, rocky desert plain called the *hammada*, and your first glimpse of their mountainous dunes is something to treasure. Comparisons between the two ergs is inevitable (see "Which Desert, Merzouga or M'hamid?" on p. 193), but whichever one you choose, the effort to get there is definitely worth it. See chapter 8.

- **Western High Atlas:** The western end of the High Atlas mountain range is home to most of Morocco's—and some of North Africa's—highest peaks, and can be conveniently accessed on a day trip from Marrakech or Ouarzazate. The 4,167m-high (13,671-ft.) Jebel Toubkal is often snowcapped for much of the year, while the area's lower grassy slopes and valleys are delightfully pleasant and cool retreats from the hot plains below. See chapter 7.
- **Agadir Bay:** Golden sand stretches around this crescent-shaped bay for 9km (5½ miles), most of which is protected from the often-strong sea breeze. With relatively calm Atlantic waters lapping on the shore, the bay has

attracted many international resort chains on the southern edge of Agadir city. Large numbers of tourists lazing on roped-off private beaches are more reminiscent of Europe than Morocco, but the bay is big enough for everyone and is a warm delight for most of the year. See p. 391.

- **Oualidia Lagoon:** This crescent-shaped lagoon—fringed by golden sands and protected from the crashing Atlantic waves by a naturally formed breakwater—offers perfect conditions for fishing, sailing, surfing, and swimming. It's also home to Morocco's small oyster-farming industry. Apart from the summer holiday months of July and August, the otherwise sleepy village on the lagoon's shores offers a select range of comfortable accommodations and fine seafood restaurants, adding up to a great spot for few days of relaxation and recreation. See chapter 11.
- **Middle Atlas Cedar Forests:** Unlike the often-barren High Atlas range, the

Middle Atlas often comes as a pleasant surprise with its swathes of forested peaks and valleys. The scent of cedar trees abounds here, and a day's exploration around Ifrane and the nearby Mischiflen crater rewards the traveler with glorious views of these majestic trees. There's also the chance to encounter the indigenous Barbary macaque monkey and breathe in some of the freshest and most aromatic air in Morocco. See chapter 9.

- **Tafraoute & Environs:** Found within the Anti-Atlas range, the boulder-strewn mountains and lush palmeraie around the small village of Tafraoute are an artist's dream. Depending on the time of day, the boulders—some seemingly clinging to the cliff face—can be a palette of gold, gray, or pink. Coupled with valleys of green palmeraie and the white and pink blossoms of almond trees, this is one of Morocco's most scenic yet least visited areas. See chapter 12.

6 THE BEST VILLAGES

- **Asilah:** This quaint fishing village exudes a Mediterranean-style charm, true to its relatively recent Spanish history, which is amplified by the throngs of Spanish visitors and expats who fill the village during the summer months. Asilah's prestigious International Cultural Festival is worth timing your itinerary around, and it has assisted in the general beautification and restoration of the 15th-century medina. See chapter 10.
- **Ifrane:** A French-built mountain resort, Ifrane is a village like no other in Morocco. Thanks to its Swiss chalet-like architecture, neatly trimmed lawns and gardens, tree-lined lake, and clean, crisp mountain air, a stop in Ifrane is almost like leaving the country. The village is also home to a royal palace and a U.S.-curriculum university. It's a welcome retreat from Fes and Meknes dur-

ing the hot summer months and enjoys erratic snowfalls during the winter. See chapter 9.

- **Imlil:** The most popular trail head from which to trek Jebel Toubkal, the village of Imlil is witnessing a bit of a boom at the moment, thanks largely to the increasing number of visitors from Marrakech, less than a 2-hour drive away. Sitting in the Ait Mizane valley and 1,740m (5,708 ft.) high, Imlil is a very pleasant place to while away a couple of days. The silence is deafening, the nights are filled with endless stars, and there's a small but quality choice of accommodations. See chapter 7.
- **Chefchaouen:** The Rif mountains' most traveler-friendly village is also one of the country's most picturesque, sitting snugly between the twin peaks from which it takes its name. Chefchaouen's

small medina was once off-limits to all Westerners, but nowadays it's a decidedly more welcoming place, with plenty of accommodations and restaurants to suit all budgets and a square where breakfast, lunch, and dinner can blend into a daylong affair. See chapter 10.

- **Amezrou:** This small village—across the Oued Dra from its big sister Zagora—meanders through a lush palmeraie and is one of the most authentic desert settlements of the scenic Dra Valley. Although often used only as an overnight stop on the way to/from

the Erg Chigaga desert dunes, Amezrou offers the traveler multiple attractions and quality accommodations, and is worth an extended stay if you have the time. See chapter 8.

- **Oukaïmeden:** Morocco's only ski resort is also a beautiful trekking base during the warmer months. At the end of a steep, winding road, Oukaïmeden is little more than a smattering of Swiss-like holiday homes and a few hotels, although this may change in the near future with a proposed Dubai-financed property development. See chapter 7.

7 THE BEST SHOPPING

- **Marrakech Medina:** Almost every form of Moroccan arts and crafts can be found within the souks and shops of Marrakech's medina, and it's this gluttony of choice—rather than quality—that makes this the number-one shopping destination for the majority of travelers. From antiques to woodwork, it's all available and ready to be haggled over. See chapter 6.
- **Fes el Bali:** Fes is well known for its high density—and high quality—of carpet emporiums. Although the interested buyer is spoiled for choice, Fes's carpet dealers are like no other, and setting aside enough time for the bargaining and tea-drinking process is essential to a successful purchase. Also within this ancient medina, you'll find a wealth of workshops called *foundouks*, where you can see many of the traditional crafts still practiced. Fassi potters are located just outside the medina's walls and are among the best in Morocco. See chapter 9.
- **Souk es Sebbat (Meknes):** This is where you'll find some of the country's finest handmade Moroccan slippers, or *babouches*. Each small stall is jampacked with rows of colored *babouches*, and the sales pressure is pleasantly minimal. See chapter 9.
- **Tiznit Medina:** Tiznit's Souk des Bijoutiers, or Jeweler's Souk, is a maze of more than 100 small shops selling mostly silver Berber jewelry and accessories. Initially practiced by the town's long-departed Jewish silversmiths, their Berber cousins now continue the tradition within Tiznit's attractive little medina, less than a couple of hours away from modern Agadir. See chapter 12.
- **Essaouira Medina:** Within this seaside resort's increasingly popular medina is an eclectic mix of art galleries, a jeweler's souk, and shops selling everything from local *thuya* woodcrafts and argan oil-based products to surf wear and hand-made leather goods. Reflecting the whole medina itself, the hassle from shop owners is relatively mild, and the whole process is much more pleasant than that in nearby Marrakech. See chapter 11.
- **Rabat Medina:** The major bonus of shopping within Rabat's medina is the lack of hard sell by shopkeepers. Along the main shopping streets of rue Souiqa, Souk Assabbat, and rue des Consuls are shops selling everything from high-quality carpets and handmade *jellababs* to hand-carved wood furniture and jewelry. See chapter 11.

8 THE MOST AUTHENTIC CULINARY EXPERIENCES

- **Slurping Down a Dozen Oualidia Oysters:** The seaside village of Oualidia is home to Morocco's oyster farming industry, established back in 1957. Nowadays more than 200 tons of oysters are harvested annually, most of them consumed domestically. Moroccans and visitors can be seen shucking and slurping down oysters' fleshy insides all along the Atlantic coast and often within the fine-dining establishments of other inland centers. See chapter 11.
- **Eating Your Way Through Tagine Fatigue:** It's the national dish and is the name for both the two-piece clay cooking vessel and the resulting meal. Spend any length of time in Morocco, and you'll become just like everybody else—a discerning tagine connoisseur. Suffering from bouts of tagine fatigue can be countered by discovering delicious variations from the norm, such as lamb tagine with dates and figs, chicken tagine with apricot in saffron sauce, and a vegetable tagine that isn't one big mass of overcooked mush.
- **Trying Couscous by Hand:** The centerpiece of most sit-down meals in Morocco is couscous. Fine, grain-size pieces of semolina lightly steamed in an aromatic broth until light and fluffy, couscous can be served with any meat or vegetable, or a combination of both. When dining with Moroccans, you'll be encouraged to scoop up a handful—use your “clean” right hand—and roll it into a small ball before tossing it into your mouth. This is one of the main reasons why most dinner tables in Morocco are covered with plastic—and easily cleaned—tablecloths.
- **Pouring Your Mint Tea Without Spilling a Drop:** It's the national drink—jokingly described to Westerners as “Moroccan whiskey”—and is available anywhere, anytime. Traditionally brewed slowly over a charcoal fire and sweetened by large chunks of sugar, the tea is poured from an arm's length height to aerate the brew. This is to be performed two to three times—and tasted after each pour—before the tea is considered ready to drink. See “Chill . . . & Have a Hot Mint Tea” on p. 154.
- **The Freshest Seafood:** In comparison to most Western countries, Morocco's seafood is very reasonably priced with a relatively healthy range of daily catches. Feast on the freshest seafood—hand-picked by yourself and chargrilled while you wait—at various fish markets and restaurants throughout the country.
- **A Breakfast *Baghrir* Smothered in *Amlou*:** A *baghrir* is an aerated pancake, similar to a large English crumpet. Moroccans and visitors alike drool over a *baghrir* (still warm from the pan) covered in the argan-based *amlou* paste and topped with crushed cashew nuts.

9 THE MOST SCENIC DRIVES

- **The Dadès Gorge:** The 35km (22-mile) drive along this gorge's southern edge is one of the most scenic in Morocco. At the northern end of this drive, the gorge narrows considerably, the road rises and then falls in a series of hairpin bends, and one or two strategically placed cafe-restaurants take advantage of the grand views. The Dadès Gorge is often passed over by most visitors, who are intent on reaching the better-known Todra Gorge to its east or the “bright lights” of

Ouarzazate to its west. Those self-drivers, however, who take the time to turn off the highway can often have this beautiful gorge to themselves. See chapter 8.

- **Ouarzazate to Zagora:** This 168km (104-mile) stretch of road offers harsh yet beautiful mountain scenery as it winds up and over rocky, barren Jebel Anaouar before descending into the Dra Valley and its string of palmeraie and oases. The two-lane road is in pretty good shape, and there are plenty of opportunities to pull over and take in the views. See chapter 8.
- **Asni to Imlil:** Formerly a potholed gravel track, the road from Asni to the mountain trail-head village of Imlil is now tarred the whole way. Along this 17km (11-mile) drive are pretty villages clinging to the cliff sides or nestled on bends of the Oued Mizane, all the while watched over by the looming, often snowcapped peak of Jebel Toubkal. See chapter 7.
- **Tizi n'Test Pass:** The drive from Marrakech to Taroudannt takes in some of the most spectacular mountain scenery in Morocco. Dissecting the Western High Atlas, the road (the R203) has its fair share of hairpin bends and blind corners, and culminates roughly 134km (83 miles) from Marrakech and 87km (54 miles) from Taroudannt at the 2,092m-high (6,864-ft.) Tizi n'Test pass. From here the sweeping views of the Souss plain to the south are simply breathtaking, while the highest peaks of the Western High Atlas loom to the northwest. See chapter 7.
- **Tizi n'Tichka Pass:** An impressive feat of French road building, this pass lies roughly halfway between Marrakech and Ouarzazate on the tarred and relatively wide N9 highway. Higher than the Tizi n'Test to the west, the 2,260m (7,415-ft.) Tizi n'Tichka offers a harsher yet just as spectacular view, with just as many twists and turns in the road to reach it. See chapter 7.
- **The Dadès Valley:** This 70km (43-mile) stretch of highway is also called the Valley of the Kasbahs, thanks to hundreds of desert castles dotted along its route. A section of the valley is also Morocco's premier rose-growing region, and shops selling all manner of rose-based products line the tarred road. There are plenty of opportunities along the way to pull over for pictures of the closer kasbahs. See chapter 8.
- **Tetouan to Chefchaouen:** This drive leaves behind the Mediterranean plain at Tetouan and almost immediately begins the steady incline into the Rif mountains. Along the way are clusters of family compounds and small villages, inhabited by the resilient Riffians, the women often clothed in their distinctive traditional dress and wide-brimmed hats. The drive is only 59km (37 miles), but in the process the hustle and bustle—and extremely busy traffic—of Tangier and Tetouan is replaced by the chilled-out Riffian vibe. See chapter 10.